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Soviet Product Quality by Malcolm R. Hill; Richard McKay
Review by: Alastair McAuley
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the crypto-privatization of a large part of the low-priority sectors that produced social stability — but at the expense of the official economy' (pp. 212–13). Conversely, one would expect the current Soviet onslaught on the unofficial economy to cause social instability.

Grancelli has studied his topic well. He avoids all the usual traps of Soviet sources and devotes appropriate attention to underground economy and strikes, despite scant Soviet data. An often neglected point is that there is a highly-motivated vanguard of the Soviet work force, which Grancelli estimates at 15–20 per cent, while the undisciplined workers and drunkards account for only 5–7 per cent.

About half the book describes earlier western studies. Admittedly little has changed, but so much repetition of previous western research is hardly justified. The bibliography is large and well-selected, but references could have been made more conscientiously. A few authors cited are not included in the bibliography, in other cases dates in references do not match dates in the bibliography; some names are spelled differently in the text and the bibliography.

Kennan Institute
Washington, DC

ANDERS ÅSLUND

Hill, Malcolm R. and McKay, Richard. *Soviet Product Quality*. Studies in Soviet History and Society Series. Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, in association with the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, Birmingham, 1988. xv + 205 pp. Appendix. Figures. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. £29.50.

QUALITY is an elusive concept. It involves the technical and physical properties of products, their performance characteristics and elusive aspects of style and 'modernity'. Soviet industrial products have acquired an international reputation for poor quality; this study by two British engineers is intended to explore how far this reputation is deserved.

To do this, they focus upon those physical properties of machines that are prescribed in national standards. Soviet standards, *GOSTy*, are compared for the most part with British ones. These comparisons are supplemented by reports of users or consumer test agencies when available. Hill and McKay suggest that, in a market economy, the performance characteristics of products are maintained (and continually enhanced) by competitive pressures; indeed, they suggest that non-price competition of this sort is more important than cheapness in determining market-shares. In the Soviet economy, competitive selection cannot operate. Hill and McKay examine the effectiveness of the bureaucratic system of quality attestation that has been introduced as a substitute.

The book deals with machine tools, electric motors, automotive products, domestic refrigerators and cameras. For most of these product categories Hill and McKay suggest that the requirements contained in relevant *GOSTy* are similar to those laid down by the British authorities. Where they are available, user-assessments tend to suggest that Soviet products are characterized by simple and robust design; such products tend to be heavy, to look old-fashioned.

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They also tend to suffer from poor finish which adversely affects their durability and reliability.

Hill and McKay suggest that Soviet achievement of international quality levels has been due to the internal adoption of foreign standards and, where necessary, the import of foreign equipment and know-how. This accounts for the fact that few if any Soviet products are to be found at the cutting edge of new design; none of them incorporate revolutionary technologies.

Hill and McKay quote a 1973 Consumers Association test of Soviet passenger cars which reported that a significant proportion of the faults discovered could be attributed to 'lack of attention to detail during assembly'. This draws attention to the second weakness of the authors' methodology in assessing Soviet product quality. By focusing upon *GOSTy*, they tend to neglect the scale of variation in quality to be found in actual examples of the products in question. That is, they ignore the issue of quality control in the factory. But reports of the impact on plan fulfilment of the recently introduced system of *gospriemka* (under which quality-control inspectors are not employed by the producing enterprise) show how important this aspect of product quality can be.

Hill and McKay concentrate upon the quality of exported machines; these are probably better than those sold domestically. They focus upon required standards, rather than upon the attributes of actual machines. They agree that quality attestation is not as good as competitive selection in improving performance characteristics; but the methodological approach they adopt tends, in my opinion, to underestimate the contribution of this factor to overall judgements of quality. For these reasons, Hill and McKay present an optimistic assessment of the quality of Soviet products. Nevertheless, this book provides a well-written and concise account of many of the issues involved in the assessment of industrial products. It is a worthwhile addition to the growing literature on this important topic.

Department of Economics ALASTAIR MCAULEY
University of Essex

Chadwick, Margaret, Long, David, and Nissanke, Machiko. *Soviet Oil Exports: Trade Adjustments, Refining Constraints and Market Behaviour*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, for the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, Oxford, 1987. xviii + 263 pp. Map. Figures. Tables. Appendixes. Bibliography. £29.50.

THIS is a strange book. The first section, by Margaret Chadwick, resurrects old and discredited Western analyses of the Soviet oil industry and attempts to justify them on the basis of erroneous data. Thus we are told that the CIA report of 1977, which predicted Soviet oil production falling to 400 million tons in 1990 (the actual outcome will be about 635 million tons), 'was an accurate analysis and has stood the test of time'! (p. 21). Moreover, 'The CIA report turned out to be correct about a peak in oil production . . . this occurred in 1983' (p. 20). On the contrary, production rose to a new record in 1987 and is certain to go higher.

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